

The Basics of Cantoring

A Workshop for Experienced and Beginning Cantors!

- Welcome!
- The Four Basic Elements of Cantoring
 - a. **Spirituality**
 - b. **Musicality**
 - c. **Intelligibility**
 - d. **“Liturgicity”**

Spirituality : As a servant of the liturgy and a very visible “leader of prayer”, the cantor must necessarily possess a strong Catholic spirituality centered around love for the Eucharist and a desire to evangelize. There are many excellent resources available, both in print and more recently on line! However, the best and most important resource for development is regular participation in the Mass and participation in parish liturgical and social events.

Musicality: The USCCB document on liturgical music sets the bar pretty low in this aspect, almost humorously proclaiming “Persons designated for the ministry of cantor should possess the ability for singing”. While that is true, there are some specific musical skills that should be consistently practiced and improved. Among these are the fundamentals of vocal tone production (posture, placement of tone and breathing), correct pronunciation and diction and awareness of pitch. Also important is to develop a sense of tempo.

Another facet of musicality for the cantor is the mastery of musical styles and forms that are unique to liturgical music, including the various types of chant (vernacular and Latin plainchant and psalm-tones) and responsorial, antiphonal and dialogue forms such as are used in various places throughout the liturgy.

Intelligibility: The cantor must remember at all times that the primary role of music in the liturgy is to impart beauty upon and enhance the texts of the liturgy. The *text* is the element of primary importance, not the expression of the melody or the tone quality or dramatic expression of the cantor's voice. The development of a singing technique built around clear diction is of utmost importance.

Included here also is proper technique for speaking and singing with a microphone.

"Liturgicity": OK...so it's not really a word! The point is that the cantor must be intimately familiar with the various parts of the liturgy and options, and what their own role is in those parts, as well as the roles of the priest, the choir and the assembly. A lack of confidence in one's familiarity with the liturgy is readily visible to the assembly and negatively affects their confidence in participating. A solid and successful "choreography" of the liturgy depends on the cantor's knowledge of and confidence in what has happened, what is happening now and what will happen next. A good starting place is a thorough study of and memorization (yes, memorization!) of the "Order of Mass" and the various roles taken by the priest, cantor, choir and assembly in the parts of the liturgy.

- The Responsorial Psalm
 - Procedure for Singing the Responsorial
 - Singing verses using a psalm-tone
 - Underlaid Verses
 - Pointed text
- Establishing and Maintaining Tempo
 - Discerning tempo from the organ introduction
 - The "foot tapping" method
 - The "finger tapping" method
 - "Leading" vs. "following"

The Order of Mass for Cantors

The Cantor must be intimately familiar with the Order of Mass and its possible options, understanding their role at each point in relation to the role of the Priest and the role of the assembly. While it's not entirely accurate to refer to the liturgy as being "choreographed", it is critical to understand how the sections of the liturgy move from one to the other and be able to anticipate what is coming next and be prepared.

With the promulgation of "Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship" by the USCCB in 2006, changes were made to the role of the cantor during Mass such that it now differs significantly from how that role had developed up until that time. Although a thorough reading of the entire document would be beneficial, at a minimum the cantor should read the sections on the role of the Psalmist and Cantor during Mass (see below).

Also, the promulgation of the 3rd Edition of the Roman Missal has resulted in a change of terminology for some parts of the Order of Mass, most notably the Universal Prayer (formerly the Prayer of the Faithful) and the terms Entrance Chant, Offertory Chant and Communion Chant (formerly the Entrance Hymn, Offertory Hymn and Communion Hymn).

*The indication that the "cantor's voice should not predominate" is to be understood to mean that the sound of the assembly singing should be heard above that of the cantor singing. This is best accomplished either by **substantially** backing away from the microphone, or turning the microphone off, whichever is more practical in the given situation.*

Processional Hymn – (Entrance Chant)

*The Cantor should **be at the podium** to announce the Processional Hymn when the celebrant and servers are ready for the procession. The prescribed text for announcing the hymn is as follows: (Please do not add to or improvise)*

Good morning (afternoon):

All of the selections for today's Mass may be found in the _____.

The Processional Hymn is #____, (title), #____ ____.

(pronounce numbers separately the second time)

*The cantor then leads the assembly in singing the Processional Hymn, indicating for them to sing at the beginning of each verse or stanza with a **modest gesture**. The cantor's voice should not predominate when singing the Processional Hymn.*

Penitential Act –

The Penitential Act can be entirely recited, entirely sung or a combination of recited and sung.

If sung by the cantor, there are two possible forms of the Penitential Act. Form B is never sung by the cantor.

- Form A: The Confiteor with Kyrie –
*The Confiteor is recited by the assembly followed by the “Kyrie” which is sung **antiphonally** by the cantor and assembly*
- Form C: Kyrie with Invocations –
The cantor sings the invocations, concluding the first with “kyrie eleison” to which the assembly responds “kyrie eleison”, the second with “christe eleison” to which the assembly responds “christe eleison” and the third with “kyrie eleison” to which the assembly responds “kyrie eleison”.

Gloria –

*The Gloria may be sung in a variety of forms. If the refrain (Glory to God...) is repeated after each of the stanzas, AND the cantor (or choir) sings the verses alone, then the cantor **should not sing the refrain** with the assembly once they have learned it adequately. If the assembly sings the verses of the Gloria, then the cantor may sing the refrain as well, although their voice should not predominate. If a through-composed Gloria (no refrain) is used, then both cantor and assembly sing the entire text, and the cantor’s voice should not predominate.*

Responsorial –

*The singing of the Responsorial is the **primary responsibility of the cantor** and so should be given the greatest attention and time for preparation. The procedure for the responsorial is the same whether the setting is through composed or a response with psalm-tone verses (i.e Respond & Acclaim): The cantor sings the response alone, followed by the assembly singing the response. **The cantor DOES NOT sing the response with the assembly.** The cantor then sings a verse, followed by the assembly singing the response. As before, the cantor DOES NOT sing the response with the assembly. This sequence is repeated for all of the verses, ending with the assembly singing the response.*

*N.B - The verses of the Responsorial are one of the two times in the entire liturgy when the cantor’s voice **should** predominate, the other being the Gospel Verse.*

Gospel Acclamation –

The Gospel Acclamation follows the same procedure as the Responsorial. Please observe that this means the cantor DOES NOT sing the “Alleluia” (or tract during Lent) with the assembly after the verse.

Offertory Hymn – (Offertory Chant)

*The Cantor should **proceed to the podium** to announce the Offertory Hymn when the celebrant **begins** the prayer at the conclusion of the Universal Prayer. The prescribed text for announcing the hymn is as follows: (Please do not add to or improvise)*

The Offertory Hymn is #____, (title), #__ __ __.
(pronounce numbers separately the second time)

*The cantor then leads the assembly in singing the Offertory Hymn, indicating for them to sing at the beginning of each verse or stanza with a **modest gesture**. The cantor’s voice should not predominate when singing the Offertory Hymn.*

Eucharistic Prayer – (Sanctus/ Memorial/ Amen)

If the Assembly is adequately familiar with the setting of the Sanctus and Acclamations (Memorial, Amen) for the Eucharistic Prayer, the cantor remains seated and does not take part. When learning a new setting of these parts, the cantor should lead them with a modest gesture, singing only enough to support and encourage the singing of the assembly.

Agnus Dei –

*The cantor begins the singing of the Agnus Dei when the celebrant approaches the altar for the fraction rite. The cantor alone sings the invocation “Agnus Dei...” (or “Lamb of God”) in a firm and declamatory voice **the first time only**. Once the assembly begins singing (...you take away the sin of the world), the cantors voice should not predominate.*

Communion Hymn - (Communion Chant)

*The Cantor should announce the Communion Hymn or Chant immediately **after** the celebrant receives from the chalice. The prescribed text for announcing the hymn is as follows: (Please do not add to or improvise)*

The Communion Hymn is #____, (title), #__ __ __ __.
(pronounce numbers separately the second time)

*The communion hymn or chant is ordinarily in “responsorial form”, meaning a short response is sung, followed by verses alternating with the response. Unlike when singing the Responsorial, the cantor sings with the assembly on the response during communion. If the assembly is expected to sing the verses, then the cantor’s voice should not predominate. If the verses are to be sung by the cantor alone, then the cantor should make a noticeable distinction in the volume between the response and verses, singing with less volume on the response and greater support on the verses. **No gesture is used to lead the assembly during the singing of the communion hymn or chant.***

Recessional Hymn –

*The Cantor should **proceed to the podium** to announce the Recessional Hymn when the celebrant **begins** the final blessing. The prescribed text for announcing the hymn is as follows: (Please do not add to or improvise)*

The Recessional Hymn is #____, (title), #__ __ __ __.
(pronounce numbers separately the second time)

*The cantor then leads the assembly in singing the Recessional Hymn, indicating for them to sing at the beginning of each verse or stanza with a **modest gesture**. The cantor’s voice should not predominate when singing the Recessional Hymn.*

The Cantor and Psalmist in *Sing to the Lord*

The following two sections of *Sing to the Lord* describe the roles of the Psalmist and Cantor. The **bold type emphasis** is added for emphasis.

The Psalmist

34. The psalmist, or “cantor of the psalm,” proclaims the Psalm after the first reading and leads the gathered assembly in singing the refrain.⁴² The psalmist may also, **when necessary**, intone the Gospel Acclamation and verse.⁴³ Although this ministry is **distinct from the role of the cantor**, the two ministries are often entrusted to the same person.

35. Persons designated for the ministry of psalmist should possess “the ability for singing and a facility in correct pronunciation and diction.”⁴⁴ As one who proclaims the Word, the psalmist should be able to **proclaim the text of the Psalm with clarity, conviction, and sensitivity to the text, the musical setting, and those who are listening**.

36. The psalmist sings the verses of the Responsorial Psalm **from the ambo or another suitable place**.⁴⁵ The psalmist may dress in an alb or choir robe, but always wears clean, presentable, and modest clothing. Cassock and surplice, being clerical attire, are not recommended as vesture for the psalmist.

The Cantor

37. The cantor is both a singer and a leader of congregational song. **Especially when no choir is present**, the cantor may sing in alternation or dialogue with the assembly. For example, the cantor may sing the invocations of the *Kyrie*, intone the *Gloria*, **lead the short acclamations at the end of the Scripture readings**, intone and sing the verse of the Gospel Acclamation, **sing the invocations of the Prayer of the Faithful**, and lead the singing of the *Agnus Dei*. **The cantor may also sing the verses of the psalm that accompanies the Entrance, Preparation of the Gifts, and Communion**. Finally, the cantor may serve as psalmist, leading and proclaiming the verses of the Responsorial Psalm.

38. As a leader of congregational song, the cantor should take part in singing with the entire gathered assembly. **In order to promote the singing of the liturgical assembly, the cantor’s voice should not be heard above the congregation**. As a transitional practice, the voice of the cantor might need to be amplified to stimulate and lead congregational singing **when this is still weak**. However, as the congregation finds its voice and sings with increasing confidence, **the cantor’s voice should correspondingly recede**. At times, it may be appropriate to use a modest gesture that invites participation and clearly indicates when the congregation is to begin, but **gestures should be used sparingly and only when genuinely needed**.

39. Cantors should lead the assembly from a place where they can be seen by all **without drawing attention from the liturgical action**. When, however, a congregation is singing very familiar responses, acclamations, or songs that do not include verses for the cantor alone, **the cantor need not be visible**.

40. The cantor exercises his or her ministry from a **conveniently located stand, but not from the ambo**.⁴⁶ The cantor may dress in an alb or choir robe, but always in clean, presentable, modest clothing. Cassock and surplice, being clerical attire, are not recommended as vesture for the cantor.